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FM AMEMBASSY JAKARTA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3130
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA IMMEDIATE 0386
RUEHPB/AMEMBASSY PORT MORESBY IMMEDIATE 3296
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO IMMEDIATE 0199
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON IMMEDIATE 1327
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000296

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/02/2017

TAGS: PGOV PHUM

SUBJECT: SEPARATIST CLASHES SPARK PANIC, HARDSHIP IN PAPUAN HIGHLANDS

REF: A. 04 JAKARTA 10311 (FIVE KILLED IN SEPARATIST

ACTION)
1B. 04 JAKARTA 12489 (MYSTERY SHROUDS MULIA UNREST)

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Classified By: B. Lynn Pascoe, Ambassador. Reason: 1.4 (b, d)

11. (SBU) Summary: Two months of clashes between separatist guerrillas and police in Papua's Central Highlands has panicked villagers, causing them to abandon their farms and villages and resulting in reports of food shortages. Church sources place the number of displaced persons at about 2,000. While first-hand sources of information are scarce, past experience has shown such estimates tend to be high (reflets) and we believe the true number of those affected to be in the hundreds based on other reliable assessments. The refugees are reportedly facing hardship due to hunger, exposure, and related illnesses. We have no reports of large-scale violence against civilians. Official Indonesian sources at both the local and national levels claim that the police action is over and the needs of the refugees are being met. End summary.

The Backside Of Beyond

12. (SBU) The unrest is taking place in what is perhaps the most inaccessible part of Indonesia. The affected settlements are in the Yamo district near Mulia in Puncak Jaya regency. Mulia has never had any land link to Jayapura or other coastal settlements. There is a road connection to Wamena, but it is extremely hazardous because its bridge was destroyed in 2004, and passing vehicles are sometimes attacked by bandits and Free Papua Organization (OPM) guerillas. In short, access to the area is by foot or by small aircraft. The only planes that fly into the area are operated by the Indonesian military or by foreign missionaries. Reports on the situation there appear to be based on first-hand accounts from a few Papuan church sources.

13. (SBU) Tension has been escalating in the region over the last two months as a result of rebel attacks on the TNI and INP. On December 8, OPM guerrillas led by Goliath Tabuni killed Major Joko Susanto, a Kopassus (Special Forces) officer, and Tobias Sirken, a former army staff sergeant. The incident took place in the Kumibaga mountain area near Mulia. Military sources reported the two were murdered when they met with an OPM unit to persuade them to end their armed struggle. On the following day, the separatist Morning Star Flag was raised over the area. On December 13, OPM

guerrillas attacked a police officer in the same area, seizing his rifle.

¶ 14. (SBU) On December 24, OPM issued communiques reporting that they had "occupied" Mulia. There were unconfirmed reports that the OPM captured, then released, a soldier. Police reinforcements began to be flown into the Mulia area during this time. On December 29, the home of a church leader was burned. Although the cause was unknown, many local Papuans blamed security forces. Over the next several days, the police, supported by the military conducted a "sweeping" operation to drive the OPM out of the area in which the flag raising had occurred. The action was completed on January 5. According to church sources, one Papuan was shot and killed during this operation.

Villagers Flee Clashes

¶ 15. (SBU) In the first days of January, people belonging to the Lani tribe abandoned their farms and settlements in the Yamo district, fleeing to Kiyage, a two days' walk from their homes. The refugees are reportedly subsistence-level tribesmen who speak no Indonesian. According to church sources, the refugees burned two bridges over the Yamo river to prevent pursuit by either the OPM or security forces.

¶ 16. (SBU) According to a report issued by the Papuan Association of Churches, a pastoral mission sent to the area on January 16-18 estimated that over 5,000 persons had been affected by the disruption. This figure was a combined total of 2,000 refugees and inhabitants of the villages where they have sought shelter. All were reported suffering from food shortages, medicine shortages and, in some cases, exposure. Church sources also say four persons have died of illnesses contracted during their flight.

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How Many Affected?

¶ 17. (C) While the pastoral mission's account of the events in the Mulia area is probably reliable and tracks closely with versions we have heard from other sources, its estimate of the 5,000 affected persons is almost certainly inflated. The figure was derived simply by adding up the numbers of members of church congregations in the area. The acting regent, in contrast, publicly cited a figure of 2,000, but said they were now being provided for. An official Indonesian source told an International Crisis Group staff member that the true figure was 800. A police source also told the ICG that there was no TNI build-up in Mulia but several hundred extra mobile brigade troops had been brought in from Jayapura.

GOI Accounts

¶ 18. (C) The GOI has sought to counter reports circulated by ElsHAM (Institute for the Study of Human Rights) and other NGOs. The Department of Foreign Affairs (DEPLU) claims that only 50 persons fled the Yamo area and that the situation has now returned to normal.

¶ 19. (C) The Ministry of Defense (DEPHAN) provided a briefing paper on the situation to the British Embassy. The paper asserts the TNI only acted in a supporting role to the police. In response to some NGOs' claim that houses were burned, DEPHAN acknowledges three houses were burned during the period in question but only one of these incidents was attributable to police actions. DEPHAN estimates the number of displaced at 2,400 and claims that they are prevented from returning to their villages only by the fact that they have literally burned bridges behind them.

Comment

¶10. (C) The Mulia area is a historic hotbed of armed separatist activity and these security operations are cyclical. As was the case in 2004-05 (reftels), reliable first-hand information is scarce notwithstanding the numerous claims made by NGOs. It is an unfortunate reality that local people, fearing both the OPM and the security forces pursuing them, suffer hardship when they abandon their homes, and it is the responsibility of the local and national authorities to respond to their needs. In contrast to past episodes of this kind, we have received no reports, credible or otherwise, of indiscriminate violence against civilians. End comment.

PASCOE